

Age of adventure

There's a cruise for every age group – and some that tick them all off in one, finds Jane Archer

What with dodgem cars, go-karts and water slides that twist and turn before reaching a splash-tastic finale, holidays at sea have never been so much fun for kids with a sense of adventure.

But cruising is not just about little ones getting up to high jinks on the high seas. Mums and dads can roll up their sleeves and get baking in cookery schools, dine in celebrity restaurants and jive to the sounds of The Beatles in The Cavern Club,

while grandparents can listen to lectures, take a coach trip around Rome and enjoy song-and-dance productions in the theatre.

Dreadful stereotyping, it's true, but the point is there are cruise ships out there for agents to match to clients of all ages and with all interests. Not only that, but pick the right one and three generations can enjoy their own brand of fun by day and get back together for quality family time over dinner each evening.

► BABIES AND TODDLERS

It's never too soon to get kids cruising, as Royal Caribbean International, Norwegian Cruise Line and P&O Cruises will all testify. Their ships have free-to-use toy rooms where babies and toddlers aged from six months old can play with Mum and Dad, along with paid-for nurseries where youngsters can nap while parents take a break. Charges range from \$6 an hour to \$20 for two hours. ➔



➔ All Disney Cruise Line ships have play areas and nurseries for babies and toddlers aged six months to three years old where parents can leave the kids. Reservations are needed, and the cost is \$9 an hour.

CHILDREN

Cruising is an endless round of fun for children under 12, with science games, pizza-making, and arts and crafts in children's clubs. There are aqua parks with chutes and fountains for youngsters, and thrilling water slides, climbing walls and Formula One racing car simulators for older kids.

NCL's Caribbean-based *Norwegian Escape* has water slides that riders are literally dropped into, a ropes course with swinging beams and zip wires, and six-inch-wide planks over the side of the ship that daredevils can walk.

Norwegian Epic, which sails the Med in summer, has the 200ft Epic Plunge – riders race down on an inner tube, then swoosh around a bowl before being plunged into the pool below. From £1,149 per person cruise-only for a seven-night Western Mediterranean cruise round-trip from Civitavecchia departing August 22.

Royal Caribbean's *Harmony of the Seas* has the Ultimate Abyss, a dry slide that plunges riders 100 feet in about 13 seconds, and a trio of fun flumes. These will also be on *Symphony of the Seas* when it launches in March.

Anthem of the Seas has skydiving, dodgem cars and roller skating, while



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Independence of the Seas is cruising from Southampton this summer with a new aquapark, top-deck trampolines and laser tag, as well as a Flowrider surf simulator and ice-skating rink. The latter is from £899 per person for an eight-night Norwegian Fjords cruise round-trip from Southampton departing July 28.

Carnival Cruise Lines' *Carnival Vista*, cruising the Caribbean from Miami this summer, has hanging bikes that go around an 800ft track at the top of the ship at speeds of up to 18mph (these will also be on *Horizon*, which makes a brief appearance in the Med in April) and Kaleid-o-Slide, a flume with flashing colours and music as you slide down.

MSC Cruises' new *MSC Meraviglia* has a ropes course and full-sized bowling alley, while new ships *MSC Seaside* and *MSC Seaview* (the former is in Miami, the latter launches in the Med in June) have zip wires.

Others to consider include Princess Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Holland America Line and P&O Cruises, as all have family-friendly ships with kids'



clubs and swimming pools. Marella Cruises' *Marella Discovery* and *Marella Discovery 2* have kids' clubs, climbing walls and games arcades.

TEENS

Even the coolest teens will become kids again on the water slides, dodgems, surf simulators, zip wires, go-karts and laser tag games on these big floating resorts. In a weak moment, they may even agree to race Dad around the ropes course!

These activities are there for all ages to enjoy – though some have height restrictions if they are unsuitable for younger children – and most are free to use. Exceptions include MSC's Formula One simulators and 4D cinemas, while NCL is still deciding whether to slap a fee on the go-karting on *Norwegian Bliss*.

Teens can always go back to being cool again in the hip hangouts on the big ships. These variously have air hockey tables, jukeboxes and computer games, as well as pods where they can plug in their iPhones and chill out listening to music and watching films.

Disney's *Disney Magic* is back in the Med this summer with a new-look teen club for 14 to 17-year-olds. Called Vibe, the area is being refurbished as a trendy urban loft where teens can ➔



PICTURE: MICHEL VERDURE; KENT PHILLIPS

TOP: Disney's *Fantasy*

LEFT: Ultimate Abyss, *Harmony of the Seas*



LEFT:
Atul Kochhar
on board
P&O's *Azura*

RIGHT:
Royal
Caribbean's
Wonderland

BELOW:
Norwegian
Cruise Line's
Spice H2O



➔ grab a coffee or smoothie, learn to DJ and make movies.

Princess Cruises' Beach House teen club is for 13 to 17-year-olds and lays on Rock the Boat parties, hip-hop dance classes and video game tournaments, while Carnival's Circle C for 12 to 14s and Club O2 for 15 to 17s have parties, games, movies and karaoke. The children can also sign up for basketball and dodgeball contests in the nets.

Star Clippers' tall ships don't have facilities for children, but teens with a sense of adventure can hoist sails, learn to tie knots and climb the mast to the crow's nest. From £1,455 per person excluding flights for a week cruising around the Northern Cyclades, departing August 4 or 11.

MUM AND DAD
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make sure there is plenty to occupy mums and dads – and grans and grandads too if they fancy coming along – while the kids are having fun. Unfortunately for the parents, most of the things they might like to do, such as spa treatments, wine-tasting and top-notch speciality dining, cost extra.

Carnival ships and P&O's *Britannia*, *Azura* and *Ventura* have adult-only decks where grown-ups can relax in the sun

away from kids. On Princess it's called the Sanctuary and offers massages under the sun. Celebrity Cruises' new *Celebrity Edge*, like its other ships, will have a solarium exclusively for over-16s.

All three P&O ships have Sindhu, an Indian restaurant that serves menus created by Michelin-starred chef Atul Kochhar. He will be passing on hints and tips in cooking demos on four *Ventura* and *Azura* cruises in 2018, while celebrity chefs James Martin, Eric Lanlard and Marco Pierre White will be hosting classes in the Cookery Club on nine *Britannia* sailings. From £622 per person for a seven-night cruise with Atul round-trip from Southampton departing July 20.

Royal Caribbean ships have Jamie's Italian restaurants that were created in partnership with

Jamie Oliver, alongside Japanese Izumi, upmarket 150 Central Park, Chops Grille steakhouses and quirky Wonderland. Princess has Sabatini's Italian trattoria, while MSC Cruises' *MSC Meraviglia* has a posh Chef's Table where guests can enjoy seven courses with seven wines, for €100 per person.

All four Disney ships have a swimming pool and Palo, an upmarket Italian restaurant, exclusively for adults, while *Dream* and *Fantasy* additionally have Remy, a French-inspired eatery, and a large 'no kids' section with sophisticated champagne and cocktail bars, and a cool nightclub.

NCL's *Epic*, *Breakaway*, *Getaway* and *Escape* have an adult-only daytime retreat called Spice H2O that changes beat after nightfall. The swimming pool becomes a dance floor, ➔





PICTURE: JOAN MARCUS

ABOVE: *Jersey Boys* on *Norwegian Bliss*

→ which means it's time for some clubbing under the stars.

If partying isn't their thing, adults can watch live performances of the musical *Jersey Boys* on the new *Norwegian Bliss*, and *Cirque du*

Soleil shows on *MSC Meraviglia*. *Hairspray* will be playing in the theatre on Royal Caribbean's new *Symphony of the Seas*, while high dives and watery acrobatics feature in the show *HiRo* in the ship's AquaTheatre.

NO KIDS, PLEASE

Just as there are cruises for kids of all ages, there are ships for adults who crave peaceful holidays away from families.

Cultural cruise line Voyages to Antiquity bans children under 12, while Viking Cruises and Cruise & Maritime Voyages don't allow kids under the age of 16 (but CMV is bending the rules with eight family cruises this summer).


P&O Cruises' *Arcadia* and *Oriana* sail from the UK exclusively for those aged 18 or over; Virgin Voyages will be banning under-18s from its first ship when it launches in 2020.

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines doesn't attract many families but has designated 30 voyages between now and December as adult-only (18-plus) for people who want to be sure of a child-free holiday. Options include a 10-night German Waterways cruise from Dover in April from

£1,199 per person.

Marella Cruises' voyages from Dubrovnik this summer will be child-free (no under-16s), as are its debut season of voyages in Asia in 2018-19 and all repositioning cruises between Europe and the Caribbean.

Saga Cruises doesn't just ban kids from its two ships – no one under the age of 50 can get on, although a companion can be aged 40 or over. From £1,217 per person for a seven-night Scandinavian Seascapes cruise round-trip from Dover, departing September 13.

Stringent rules about taking kids out of school mean term time is usually a good time for a child-free cruise, although family ships could still have babies and toddlers on board. Luxury lines such as Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Silversea and Seabourn are also a good bet as they don't tend to attract families. 



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